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FINAL RECORD OF THE SIX HUNDRED AND FORTY-NINTH PLENARY MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Tuesday, 18 May 1993, at 10 a.m.

President: Mr. Jon Legg (Canada)

GE.93-60853 (E)

The PRESIDENT: I declare open the 649th plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament.

As the current President of the Conference, Ambassador Shannon, has been recalled to Ottawa for consultations, in accordance with rule 10 of the rules of procedure I have the honour of replacing him today.

At the outset, I wish to welcome warmly, on behalf of the Conference and myself, the new representative of Bulgaria, Ambassador Dobrev, who is attending the plenary for the first time. In doing so, I wish to assure him of the cooperation of my delegation in the work of the Conference.

You will recall that, at the last plenary meeting of the first part of the annual session, the President announced that he intended to put before the Conference at the beginning of the second part of the session the recommendation contained in paragraph 13 of the progress report on the thirty-fifth session of the Ad Hoc Group of Scientific Experts to Consider International Cooperative Measures to Detect and Identify Seismic Events, circulated as document CD/1185, concerning the dates for the next session of the Ad Hoc Group. Accordingly, I shall proceed to do so at this plenary meeting, once we have listened to the speakers inscribed to address the Conference today.

I have on the list of speakers for today the representatives of Australia and Mexico.

I now give the floor to the representative of Australia, Ambassador O'Sullivan.

Mr. O'SULLIVAN (Australia): Mr. President, since this is the first time that I have spoken during Canada's presidency, I should like to congratulate you and Ambassador Shannon on the assumption of the leadership of the Conference on Disarmament and assure you that you have the full support of the Australian delegation.

I would like to offer some comments on the latest progress report to this Conference from the Ad Hoc Group of Scientific Experts to Consider International Cooperative Measures to Detect and Identify Seismic Events, contained in document CD/1185, to which you have just referred and which we will consider later this morning.

Might I at the outset underline Australia's appreciation for the ongoing work of the Group, and in particular of Dr. Dahlman, its Chairman. During long years of political stalemate, the quiet work on seismic verification undertaken by the GSE in fact represented the only tangible progress being made under the Conference's auspices towards the achievement of a comprehensive nuclear test ban treaty.

I express Australia's thanks to those concerned: their patient work has left us with a solid technical basis on which to construct the multilateral legal undertakings of a CTBT.

(Mr. O'Sullivan, Australia)

The report we have before us today confirms that the seismic technique offers the international community a technology which is sufficiently reliable to form the core of a future CTBT verification regime.

This core will, of course, need to be supplemented and complemented by other verification techniques. As the report indicates, further enhancement of the seismic technique and development of technical approaches to the future global verification network will also need to be pursued.

However, the central leg of a "verification pack" for a CTBT, a credible global deterrent against future nuclear testing, is clearly visible.

I make these initial remarks because it seems to my delegation that the cumulative effect of international developments affecting the nuclear-test-ban issue is such that the world community - and the Conference on Disarmament in particular - will very shortly be looking to reap fruit from the GSE. Fruit in the shape of a fully mature scheme for the practical and credible application of the best seismic science available to verifying compliance with a CTBT.

In this context, Australia supports the declared and legislated public policy position taken by the United States, most recently in President Clinton's 23 April statement: we share the belief that achievement of a CTBT should be a high-priority and time-bound process.

At the 1992 session of the United Nations General Assembly, the international community gave unprecedented levels of support to a resolution calling for progress towards a Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. We have also witnessed an unprecedented level of constructive activity by the nuclear-weapon States in applying testing moratoria, in proposing pre-negotiating consultative frameworks, and in agreeing and implementing deep cuts in existing arsenals of nuclear weapons.

Some of these initiatives have been favoured with the appropriate positive public recognition. Some have been carried through more modestly and with little fanfare.

Nevertheless, Australia believes that the atmosphere of the CTBT discussion has changed fundamentally, and that momentum towards negotiations will continue to build, including specifically here, in the Conference on Disarmament.

As its mandate shows, the GSE is a subsidiary technical body of this Conference. Its role is to inform in a technical sense a particular political discussion being pursued among national delegations in the Conference (or more

specifically in the Ad Hoc Committee on a Nuclear Test Ban). This implies a close and collaborative relationship which, I regret to say, has probably been the exception rather than the rule over previous years, chiefly due to stagnation of political discussions.

(Mr. O'Sullivan, Australia)

Times are changing, however. There is a sharper focus in the Ad Hoc Committee on comprehensive nuclear-test-ban issues and on the practical implications. Australia considers that delegations individually - and perhaps the Conference as a whole - need to ensure that the GSE is fully informed as to the political debate in the Ad Hoc Committee and the options available. On the other hand, the time has come in our view for the GSE to re-examine its reporting. The CTBT verification implications of the fine seismic work the GSE undertakes need to be immediately and clearly intelligible to non-scientific members of the Conference. Increasingly, there will be demand for the GSE to address with the best scientific information available the actual and immediate negotiating needs of this forum.

Without such a collaborative approach, this Conference would be hard-pressed to complete a CTBT negotiating mandate satisfactorily. What was satisfactory when the GSE was effectively a substitute for political discussion in the Conference will not be satisfactory for supporting our future negotiations, or even serious pre-negotiation.

Australia consequently is prepared to accept the GSE's proposal to meet again in Geneva from 26 July to 6 August 1993 which is contained in the last or second-last paragraph of the report we will consider in a few minutes. We see this as an opportunity for significantly advancing work on seismic verification - a top priority - in accordance with the political priorities alluded to above. The meeting will also provide an opportunity for re-examination of the working relationship between the Conference and the GSE, and should result in a better-defined and more productive working partnership.

Australia has carefully considered and noted the contents of document CD/1185. We endorse the vast majority of it, and welcome the emerging technical consensus on the possible configuration of a global network of seismic stations. We particularly welcome the generous offer of the United States to provide a prototype international seismic data processing centre for use in collaborative development efforts. We also commend to other delegations the GSE's report on the GSETT-2 trial.

That said, we find it necessary to comment on a number of aspects of the report with which we are not able to agree, and which Australia believes underline the need for a closer, more sensitive, and more accountable relationship between the Conference and the Group.

The output of the GSE needs to be more readily comprehensible to the negotiating forum it serves. This affects both style and content of current reporting. Excellent science deserves excellent interpretation into the language of laymen. The intention after all is to inform a non-scientific negotiating forum. This involves providing technical answers to essentially political questions which both the subject matter itself and the negotiators raise. Equally it implies a readiness for the technical forum to ask for political guidance when formulation of technical answers requires better definition of political options under consideration.

(Mr. O'Sullivan, Australia)

This is a matter of common sense and intelligent interaction, both of which are entirely consistent with the GSE's mandate. However, the current culture of relations between the Conference and the GSE seems in need of some adjustment in order to realize such an objective.

Secondly, Australia was disappointed to note that what we understand to be the growing political urgency of finalizing details of a global approach to seismic verification is not reflected in CD/1185. Like other members of the Conference, we would have hoped for clear details of technical issues still outstanding, and an accounting of the firm strategies and timetables developed by the GSE in order to finalize the necessary seismic development work in a time-bound way.

In particular, we should like to know more of the costs of the options for a seismic verification network, so that we can consider more realistically States parties' obligations under a CTBT.

Thirdly, we were interested to note a number of comments in the report which appear to assume particular outcomes on questions which fall within the political negotiating authority of the Conference, where there is as yet no political agreement.

To our knowledge, contrary to the implication of paragraph 8 of CD/1185, there is no agreement in the Conference that a future verification data network for a CTBT will be restricted to "seismic" data. In the light of forthcoming discussions on non-seismic verification in the Ad Hoc Committee on a Nuclear Test Ban, an a priori exclusion of "non-seismic" (even if seismic-related) data seems a particularly curious and unhelpful assumption.

This conclusion is reinforced by the fact that the previous report of the GSE, CD/1163 of August 1992 specifically envisaged "continuing the discussion of its future work, including the incorporation of new technologies" at the thirty-fifth session. We would appreciate reporting which reflects GSE discussion of how its ongoing work is making provision for the incorporation of the various new and non-seismic technologies which might be relevant.

Likewise, we were interested to note an assertion towards the end of paragraph 9 of the report to the effect that interpretation of any verification data will reside with individual participant States and is "not a role of the international data centre or part of the global system". Any such decision, if taken forward into a CTBT, would of course have far-reaching implications for the verification regime. It would clearly be a political rather than a technical choice. As such, it is yet to be made by negotiators.

(Mr. O'Sullivan, Australia)

It may be necessary for the purposes of GSE technical development work to focus on an artificially truncated version of the data network which may eventually be required by negotiators. Nevertheless, it is essential that ongoing work take account of the fact that different models, most of which involve central data processing and analysis/interpretation, are under active consideration by Conference delegations.

We consider the final CTBT outcome is much more likely to involve a central organization charged by States parties with central data processing and analysis functions. We see no reason to believe that the political and practical considerations which led negotiators to adopt this verification and compliance strategy in other multilateral arms control instruments (such as the NPT and the CWC) should be inapplicable a priori to a CTBT. Rather, there are clear political and practical benefits to a verification and compliance mechanism which is driven by a multilateral and therefore impartial organization capable of representing in an informed and engaged manner the interests of all States parties. I note that in any case even central processing of seismic data so as to resolve "simple" technical inconsistencies must of necessity involve exercise of some central analysis functions.

I raise these points to indicate the potential for a more productive symbiosis between the Conference and its technical advisers. At present, there is a risk of the high-quality technical seismic work not being appreciated for the major achievement which it represents, and of the Conference not gaining the full benefit of the GSE's expertise in designing a CTBT verification regime based on "good science".

On the other hand, without better contact and habits of communication between the GSE and the Conference which it serves, there is also a risk of excellent scientific resources being wastefully deployed other than in full cooperation and coordination with the thinking of negotiators.

Measures which might assist this process might include:

Revision of the format and content of the GSE's regular reporting to the Conference, and of the Conference's formal communication with the GSE (including responses to reports);

Secondly, more Conference on Disarmament delegations deciding to participate in the work of the GSE;

Thirdly, measures to be taken by individual delegations to strengthen their international policy and technical coordination (more diplomats for instance, attending GSE, and GSE delegates to attend the Ad Hoc Committee on a Nuclear Test Ban and so on); and,

Finally, more regular informal but structured links between the GSE and the Ad Hoc Committee on a Nuclear Test Ban.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the representative of Australia for his statement and for the kind words he expressed to the Chair.

I now give the floor to the representative of Mexico, Ambassador Marín Bosch.

Mr. MARIN BOSCH (Mexico) (translated from Spanish): Mr. President, we are happy to see you presiding over today's meeting. We would like to extend a very warm welcome to the new representative of Bulgaria and we wish every success to his predecessor, Ambassador Ditchev.

On the resumption of the work of this Conference, the delegation of Mexico would like to make a brief statement on the main item on our agenda, namely, the complete prohibition of nuclear testing. During our recess there have been some important developments on this and other matters relating to nuclear disarmament.

Just a few days ago the forty-sixth World Health Assembly adopted a resolution in which it sought an advisory opinion from the International Court of Justice on the following question: In view of its effects on health and the environment, would the use of nuclear weapons by a State in war or other armed conflict be a breach of its obligations under international law, including the WHO Constitution?

Over the past month the annual session of the United Nations Disarmament Commission took place; at it we managed to conclude successfully a document on regional disarmament. We salute and appreciate the work of Ambassador Hoffmann of Germany as chairman of the working group concerned. The Commission was, however, unable to conclude its work on the science and technology item. Nor was there any significant progress on nuclear disarmament. It would appear that there are delegations that are much more interested in conventional or regional disarmament than in the questions related to the priority topics of the elimination of all weapons of mass destruction, and most particularly nuclear weapons. Ambassador Shannon will surely have had evidence of this during his term of office as the President of this Conference on Disarmament.

During the past week some of us also attended in New York the first session of the Preparatory Committee for the 1995 Conference for the review and extension of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (the NPT). It was evident there too that some delegations, almost all of them belonging to the group of eastern European countries and the western European and other groups, prefer a rather perfunctory, closed-door preparatory process. We on the other

hand, along with the non-aligned countries, advocate a transparent preparatory process that is to say, one open to the public, to non-governmental organizations and above all to those States that are not parties but are interested in attending. Likewise, we are convinced that the 1995 NPT Conference needs very thorough preparation. For every international conference over the past few years, including last year's UNCED and the human rights conference this coming June, there has been very detailed preparation of final documents - in whose elaboration, I might add, non-governmental organizations played, precisely at the urging of the western and other countries, an important role.

(Mr. Marin Bosch, Mexico)

A great majority of delegations to the Preparatory Committee of the 1995 Conference stressed the importance for the future of the NPT of the early conclusion of a treaty banning all nuclear tests forever (a CTBT). We share the opinion that the international situation regarding this question is particularly favourable now. And we also share the view that this situation may not last long.

Three nuclear-weapon States are observing a moratorium on testing and in a fourth country there is a de facto moratorium. These moratoria have been declared unilaterally and have had a very positive impact. Their unilateral interruption would without any doubt provoke a chain reaction in other countries and we would very soon revert to the practices of the past instead of striving for a less heavily armed and therefore less insecure world. It is therefore necessary to obtain the extension of these moratoria while the multilateral negotiation of a CTBT is getting under way. In the meantime we must work intensely in the Ad Hoc Committee so determinedly chaired by Ambassador Tanaka. We await with interest the distribution announced by Sweden of a new version of its draft test-ban treaty.

My Government has followed with interest the evolution of the policies on nuclear testing of France and of the United States and Russia. It has been a very positive evolution. We welcome the French initiatives in this area. As for the United States, we are gratified by the efforts being made to achieve by 30 September 1996 a multilateral agreement for the total prohibition of these tests pursuant to the legislation adopted by Congress last year. We are convinced that the negotiation of a CTBT in a multilateral disarmament forum such as this one is the best way to attain what is one of the main goals the international community has set itself on disarmament. Among other things, it would ensure the strengthening of the regime for the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons, avoiding the emergence of further nuclear-weapon States and the continued qualitative development of the existing arsenals.

At present the new United States Administration is studying various options in this respect. In that Government there are those who advocate a nuclear test ban that would only cover the tests over one kilo ton. Others have insisted that the programme of tests contemplated by existing legislation be carried out until 1996. Finally, others have defended the thesis, which we share, that the time

has come to ban all nuclear tests. The latter argue with reason that the benefits to be derived from a CTBT are very much greater than the advantages that might be obtained from a limited nuclear test programme. It is obvious that the new Administration in Washington is divided on the question. The final decision will have to be taken by President Clinton. He will have to choose between going down in history as the last post-war President to have carried out nuclear tests or the first to have stopped doing so. The choice is his.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the representative of Mexico for his statement and his kind words addressed to me.

That concludes my list of speakers for today. Does any other delegation wish to take the floor at this stage?

I give the floor to the representative of Bulgaria.

Mr. DOBREV (Bulgaria): Mr. President, the Bulgarian delegation has already conveyed its congratulations on the occasion of the Canadian presidency, but let me also, in my personal capacity, reiterate our full support to you in fulfilling the remaining part of your responsible task.

Allow me to express my sincere thanks for the kind words of welcome you and other colleagues addressed to me. It is an honour for me to participate in the work on the Conference on Disarmament, the sole multilateral body for arms control in disarmament negotiations. My Government highly appreciates the key role the Conference on Disarmament continues to play in strengthening international peace and security.

Mr. President, I pledge to you and all my colleagues in this chamber my full cooperation and that of my delegation in promoting the work of the Conference.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the representative of Bulgaria for his statement and for his kind words to me and to my delegation.

I will now therefore turn to the issue that I announced at the beginning of the meeting. I intend now to put before the Conference for adoption the recommendation contained in paragraph 13 of the progress report on the thirty-fifth session of the Ad Hoc Group of Scientific Experts, concerning the dates for the next session of the Ad Hoc Group, which are in fact from 26 July to 6 August. If there is no objection, I shall take it that the Conference adopts this recommendation.

It is so decided.

As you know consultations have proceeded to advance the plenary meeting for next week, scheduled for Thursday, 27 May, to Tuesday, 25 May. His Excellency the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Norway, Mr. Johan Jorgen Holst, has expressed the wish to address the Conference on that occasion. It is my understanding that

members have kindly agreed to this advance of the plenary. Accordingly, we shall hold the plenary meeting next week on Tuesday, 25 May.

It is so decided.

I shall now turn to the informal paper circulated by the secretariat containing the timetable of meetings to be held next week by the Conference and its subsidiary bodies. As usual, the timetable is merely indicative and may be changed if the need arises. On that understanding, I suggest that we adopt the timetable.

It is so decided.

(The President)

As you know, the presidency of Canada will be concluded this week. I know that on his return Ambassador Shannon will wish to share with you his views on a number of substantive questions before the Conference. Accordingly, I will not take more of your time today. I should like, however, to express my delegation's appreciation to all the delegations participating in the work of the Conference for their assistance and cooperation during the Canadian presidency. I should also like to convey to Ambassador Hou Zhitong of China, the incoming President of the Conference, our best wishes for success in his new responsibilities, which I am sure he will discharge with wisdom because of his well-known experience and diplomatic competence. Before concluding this meeting, I would recall that, as agreed, the next plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament will be held on Tuesday, 25 May, at 10 a.m. sharp. I hope that delegations will be available at that time so as to make it possible for the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Norway to deliver his statement as scheduled.

This concludes our work for today and I shall now adjourn this plenary meeting.

The plenary meeting stands adjourned.

The meeting rose at 10.55 a.m.